

## **A study of health practices and prevalence of anaemia in adolescent girls**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Anaemia is a widely prevalent nutritional problem across the world, especially in the developing and underdeveloped countries. Besides inadequate diet, poverty, lack of awareness, worm infestation, early pregnancy, illiteracy and poor access to health care services are some of the factors contributing to this situation. Adolescence is a period of rapid growth and development. It is a very crucial period as it is the period for preparation for adulthood and maturity. Hence, nutrition and health of adolescent girls needs special attention.

**Key Words :** Adolescence, Nutrition, Anaemia

### **INTRODUCTION**

World Health Organisation has defined adolescence as a period between 10 to 19 years. The estimated global adolescent population is 1198.7 million and youth population is 1223.4 million as per the United Nations' World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision (June, 2013). Most importantly, India, which is the world's second most populous country, has a higher number of adolescents than China while youth population in China is marginally higher than that of India. The estimates suggest that one-fifth of the world's adolescents and youth reside in India (UNFPA, 2014).

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It is marked as a phase of rapid growth and maturation involving physical, psychological as well as sexual maturation. Adolescence is a period in the life of girls which prepares them for future mothers and therefore, is a vulnerable period. Nutrition and health of adolescents is likely to affect the health of generations to come. Therefore, diet during this period needs special care and attention.

Anaemia is one of the most common and intractable nutritional problems globally, affecting both developing and developed countries with major consequences for human health as well as social and economic development. Adolescents, especially girls, are particularly vulnerable to iron deficiency (WHO, 2011). The present study was planned to assess the health status and haemoglobin level of college going adolescent girls.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study respondents comprised of 120 college going adolescent girls. A structured and pre-

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tested questionnaire was used to collect data. Information relating to type of family, education, occupation, health practices and haemoglobin level were collected. The data so received was tabulated and analyzed and results drawn.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nearly two-third of the study sample came from nuclear families. Most of the respondents (95%) were non-working. Fathers of most girls belonged to service or business class while majority of the mothers were housewives. Seventeen fathers and sixteen mothers were illiterate while for the rest, the educational level varied from primary to graduation and above.

### Health Practices:

Health relating information (Table 1) revealed that regular health checkups were not a part of life style. Most of the respondents (98.33%) had irregular health checkups and that too only when a need arose due to some ailment. Exercise and walk were also not common. The percentage of study sample doing exercise and walk was 20.83% and 31.67% respectively.

A little more than half of the subjects didn't face any health problems while some respondents reported multiple health issues. Major health problems faced included fatigue (35.83%), headache (28.33%), allergy from different sources (14.17%), stomach ache (13.33%), constipation (9.17%), sleeplessness (5.83%), pain in joints (4.17%), low blood pressure (2.50%) and one subject reported problem of diarrhoea.

Table 1: Health practices		
Details	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
<b>Exercise</b>		
Yes	25	20.83
No	95	79.17
<b>Go for Walk</b>		
Yes	38	31.67
No	82	68.33
<b>Health Checkup</b>		
Regular	2	1.67
Irregular	118	98.33
<b>Major Health Problems Faced*</b>		
Nil	65	54.17
Constipation	11	9.17
Diarrhoea	1	0.83
Headache	34	28.33
Pain in Joints	5	4.17
Allergy	17	14.17
Stomachache	16	13.33
Fatigue	43	35.83
Sleeplessness	7	5.83
Low BP	3	2.50
High BP	0	0.00

\*Multiple Responses

**Prevalence of Anaemia:**

The mean haemoglobin level of the subjects was found to be 10.80+/-0.81g/dl. Comparing this to the WHO standards (WHO, 2011), it was found that 30.83% of the subjects (Table 2) were in the normal range, 45.83% of the adolescents were mildly anaemic while 23.33% were suffering from moderate anaemia. None of the subjects was severely anaemic. High prevalence of anaemia in adolescent girls has been reported by various other researchers also (Biradar *et al.*, 2012; Deshpande *et al.*, 2013).

<b>Table 2: Prevalence of Anaemia</b>		
Details	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
Normal	37	30.83
Mild Anaemia	55	45.83
Moderate Anaemia	28	23.33
Severe Anaemia	0	0.00

The results of the above study show that the haemoglobin level of many of the adolescents was below normal. Adolescence is a period for preparation for adulthood when various physical changes occur. The situation is quite crucial since they are the future mothers in whose lap the next generation will be cradled. Therefore, diet and health counselling for adolescent girls and for their parents need to be organized to improve the situation and better the nutritional status. Healthy lifestyle habits should be inculcated in day to day life.

**Conclusion:**

The percentage of anaemic adolescent girls is alarming and steps need to be taken to improve their nutritional status. The college-going girls need awareness regarding importance of nutrition and health. Their health status during adolescence age influences their reproductive functioning and pregnancy outcome. Long term studies incorporating large sample size and detailed analysis of diet intake and nutritional status need to be planned. Studies on controlled groups may be conducted to analyse effect of nutritional supplements suitable for this age group.

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